ISSN 0703-8763

Edmonton Area Series Report No. 61

# MALE ATTITUDES TOWARD ABORTION: AN ANALYSIS OF URBAN SURVEY DATA

by

Akin Adebayo

Population Research Laboratory
Department of Sociology
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2H4, Canada

The 1977, 1984, and 1987 Edmonton Area Studies were administered and supported by the Population Research Laboratory of the Department of Sociology at The University of Alberta.

August 1988

**Abstract**

Utilizing data from Edmonton Area Surveys of 1977, 1984, and 1987, this paper examines the attitudes of Canadian men toward the contentious issue of abortion. Respondents were presented with various different circumstances for abortion and asked to indicate the conditions in which they feel women ought to or ought not to be allowed to obtain a legal abortion. Findings reveal that attitudes toward abortion vary greatly depending upon the criteria for abortion.

Endangering the mother's health elicited the most favourable attitude toward abortion between 1977 and 1987. The findings also depict a slight trend toward greater opposition to legalized abortion on the grounds of possible birth defect, while the approval of legal abortion on the grounds of rape increased marginally during the ten-year period. The paper goes further to examine socio-demographic variations in attitudes toward abortion. Some of the neglected issues that will likely make future Canadian abortion legislation impotent are also discussed.

**Introduction**

Abortion has always been an explosive topic in Canada. Legislation regarding abortion has changed considerably over the past two decades. In June 1969, for example, the Canadian Parliament Amendments to the Criminal Code legalized the termination of a pregnancy under specific conditions (Revised Statutes of Canada, Chapter C-34, Section 251):

a. the abortion procedure must be performed by a qualified physician, who may not be a member of the hospital's therapeutic abortion committee; or an approved hospital; and
b. the decision regarding the termination of pregnancy is placed before the hospital's therapeutic abortion committee. The committee must decide whether or not continuation of the pregnancy would endanger the life or health of the mother.

The 1969 legislation died on January 28, 1988 when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that national abortion laws were unconstitutional because they violated a woman's right to privacy. This judicial decision has undoubtedly fuelled the abortion debate in Canada. While this contentious topic has polarised the country, public debate is gaining momentum, particularly in the political arena, on the legality and circumstances in which abortion ought or ought not to be permissible in Canada.

While the opposing positions on this debate have been put forward by pro-choice and anti-abortion groups, a number of empirical studies have also explored public opinions about the variety of circumstances under which a woman should be allowed to obtain a legal abortion (Veevers, 1971; Balakrishnan et al., 1972; Ebaugh and Harvey, 1980; Hartnagel et al., 1984). However, the overwhelming majority of abortion attitude surveys have focused on only one-half of the Canadian population — women. Studies of male attitudes toward abortion in Canada are very scarce, except for sporadic efforts to include men for comparative purposes. Thus, there have been no attempts to examine differentiated response patterns among men toward abortion.

A number of reasons can be advanced to explain why the attitudes of men toward abortion have been less frequently surveyed than the attitudes of women, especially married women: (1) women are the direct consumers of abortion services; (2) women are expected to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancy; (3) women experience the danger of pregnancy and delivery; (4) women bear most of the costs of having children including the pain, morbidity and mortality, childbirth and breastfeeding; (5) women take the responsiblity (for the most part) for physical child care and training (motherhood role). On the other hand, however, a number of reasons call for a complementary assessment of male perspectives on the issue of abortion: (1) men, not women, have the dominant political voice in setting policies and making laws governing abortion; (2) men are, for the most part, the providers of abortion services (physicians); (3) pregnancy involves both men and women; and (4) the attitudes of men toward abortion for the most part, are salient indicators of the overall level of support for abortion.

Given the fact that both men and women need to be considered in order to provide an understanding of public attitudes toward abortion, the present exploratory analysis is an attempt to partially close the gender gap in abortion attitude research. This paper will (1) examine trends in attitudes toward abortion among urban Canadian men; (2) identify those socio-demographic characteristics among men which are differentially associated with approval of a legal abortion; and (3) make suggestions for future reseach.

**Data and Method**

The data analyzed in most detail in this paper are from the 1987 Edmonton Area Study (EAS) - an amalgam survey administered annually by the Population Research Laboratory of the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta. A random sample of

addresses was drawn from a computerized list of all city household addresses enumerated in the 1986 Edmonton civic census. Personal face-to-face interviews were conducted on this sample.

Several criteria were employed in choosing the respondent within the sampled household. First, in family households, either the husband or wife was eligible for interviewing while in non-family households (i.e., any person or group of non-related persons occupying a dwelling), any member over 18 years of age was eligible. Because of a concern that women would be more likely to be at home, and thus be oversampled, interviewers were given detailed guidelines on how to obtain an equal number of male and female respondents within their given allotment of addresses. For full details of selection procedures, see Kinzel (1987).

The completed interviews were selectively and randomly verified through a number of checks which included re-contacting respondents by telephone. The final sample size was 454, giving a response rate of 76.4 percent. Of the 454 respondents, 51 percent were male and 49 percent were female. [1]

**The Male Sample**

The subsample for this analysis consists of 230 men included in the 1987 Edmonton Area Study. The respondents' mean age was 40.4 years (SD=15.3); they had an average of 13.1 years (SD=1.6) of formal education. Approximately 57 percent of the men were married; another 22 percent were either divorced, separated, or widowed. With respect to religious orientation, 21 percent were Roman Catholic, 41 percent were Protestant, and 24 percent claimed no religious preference. Sixty-four percent of the men were employed (58 percent full-time and 6 percent part-time). About 63 percent were fathers and their mean number of children was 1.67(SD=1.6).

**Measures**

The dependent variable, attitude toward abortion, was examined through a battery of abortion items included in the 1987 Edmonton Area Study. The questionnaire contained a list of circumstances in which a woman might want to obtain a legal abortion. These circumstances include "hard" reasons - those in which a woman has little or no control over her condition, and "soft" reasons — those reasons over which a woman can exercise some control over her condition. The items on circumstances for abortion were worded as follows:

Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if... [2]

a. the woman's own health is seriously endangered by pregnancy? (Health) [3]
b. she is not married and does not want to marry the father? (Marriage)
c. there is a strong chance of serious defects in the baby? (Defect)
d. the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children? (Income)
e. she is married and does not want more children? (Children)
f. she became pregnant as a result of rape? (Rape)
g. she is likely to suffer a nervous breakdown if she has the baby? (Breakdown)
h. she is married and became pregnant as a result of an extra-marital affair? (Affair)
i. if the woman wants abortion for any reason?

In addition to the different circumstances for abortion, respondents were also asked to state their opinions on other abortion issues such as (1) whether a woman should obtain an abortion for any reason, (2) whether abortion should be carried out without the husband's consent, (3) when human life begins, and (4) after what month of the pregnancy they think it should be illegal to perform an abortion.

The independent variables used in the present analysis include socio-demographic characteristics such as the respondents' marital status, number of children, religiosity, and religious affiliation. The choice of these independent variables was influenced by a number of studies that have found that these variables affect public attitudes toward abortion, (Balakrishnan et al., 1972; Boyd and Gillision, 1975; Hartnagel, et al 1984). [4]

**Findings**

Findings from this study are presented by two different descriptive procedures. First we examine the trends in male attitudes toward the permissibility of abortion under different conditions by drawing from the 1977, 1984 and 1987 Edmonton Area Studies (EAS). The analysis then shifts exclusively to the 1987 data. In presenting the data, we analyze the actual percentages of respondents saying "yes" to each item rather than aggregating data into mean or median scale scores. [5]

**General Trends**

It seems appropriate, prior to analysis of the 1987 (EAS) survey of male attitudes toward abortion to briefly comment on the trends in attitude for the period 1977 - 1987. Table 1 presents the trends in attitudes toward the permissibility of abortion under different circumstances. As expected, the overall attitudes of the respondents varied greatly depending upon the criteria for abortion. In general, the respondents were more supportive of abortion if the pregnancy endangers the mother's health. In 1977 the overwhelming majority (94 percent) endorsed abortion for health reasons and one percent more endorsed it in 1987. Also, in 1977 the chance of a serious defect in the baby received the second highest level of approval for a woman to terminate a pregnancy. There is a little shift in the approval of abortion on the grounds of possible birth defect, with the 1987 survey depicting a slight trend toward greater opposition to legalised abortion for this reason. About 83 percent of the men approved legal abortion if the woman became pregnant as a result of rape. The approval of legal abortion on the grounds of rape changed only marginally between 1977 and 1987. Most (72 percent) of the men in the 1987 survey endorsed abortion if a woman is likely to suffer a nervous breakdown if she had the baby.

Of the "soft" reasons, economic condition (i.e., "if the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children") received the most favourable response. In 1977, about 51 percent of the respondents favoured legalized abortion for this particular reason. However, relatively fewer men (43 percent) endorsed legal abortion under this condition in 1987. This represents a decrease of about 8 percent between 1977 and 1987. Less than half of the respondents approved abortion "if the woman isn't married and does not want to marry the father". The approval of a legal abortion for not wanting to marry the father increased by about 6 percent between 1977 and 1987 suggesting that men are becoming somewhat more tolerant in this regard. In contrast, for the condition "if the woman is married and does not want any more children", only 48 percent endorsed termination of pregnancy on this ground in 1977, while slightly fewer respondents (41 percent) approved abortion for the same reason in 1987. Fewer men do appear to be in favour of using abortion as a means of birth control. Also, in 1987, only 43 percent approved an extra-marital affair as a condition for a legal abortion. The respondents' disapproval of abortion for this reason might reflect their opposition to infidelity.

Generally, between 1977 and 1987, the men in these samples tended to maintain their support for a legal abortion for "hard" reasons such as the mother's health, or rape, although there was a decline in support for abortion if there is a chance of a serious defect in the baby. However, they indicated relatively less support for abortion due to "soft" reasons such as low income, and if a woman does not want any more children. The exception here was in the respondents' attitudes toward "the woman is not married and does not want to marry the father" where a slight increase was observed.

**Table 1**

Trends in Male Attitudes Toward the Permissibility of Abortion in Different Circumstances (1977, 1984 and 1987)[1]

| Conditions | 1977 | 1984 | 1987 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | N=162 %yes | N=230 %yes | N=230 %yes |
| a. If the pregnancy seriously endangered the woman's health | 94 (152) | 89 (205) | 95 (219) |
| b. If there is a strong chance of serious defects in the baby | 88 (143) | 83 (190) | 81 (187) |
| c. If the woman became pregnant as a result of rape | 83 (134) | 81 (186) | 84 (191) |
| d. If the woman is not married and does not want to marry the father | 49 ( 80) | 38 ( 87) | 55 (126) |
| e. If the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children | 51 ( 82) | 41 ( 95) | 43 ( 99) |
| f. If the woman is married and does not want any more children | 48 ( 78) | 42 ( 97) | 41 ( 94) |
| g. If the woman is married and becomes pregnant as a result of an extra-marital affair[2] | -- | -- | 43 ( 99) |
| h. If the woman is likely to suffer a nervous breakdown if she has the baby[2] | -- | -- | 72 (165) |

1. Six identical items (a-f) were used in the 1977, 1984, and 1987 studies. Since both sampling procedures and wording of items are consistent, trends in male attitudes toward the permissibility of abortion are explored.

2. Item not included in the 1977 and 1984 EAS.

Note: Throughout this paper, numbers in parentheses are frequencies saying "yes".

**Abortion-Related Issues**

Table 2 presents the percentage distribution of responses to four additional abortion questions asked in the 1987 study. When the respondents were asked whether abortion should be permitted if the woman wants it "for any reason", only 35 percent approved abortion. Also, a small proportion of the men (37 percent) were in favour of a law which permits a women to have an abortion operation without her husband's consent. This suggests that most of the respondents did not endorse the notion that the termination of a pregnancy should be a decision only between a woman and her physician. This finding is congruent with an analysis of gallup polls conducted in Canada between 1972 and 1974, which indicates that fewer men than women agreed that abortion should be a decision made by a woman and her doctor (Boyd and Gillieson, 1975). This implies that most men want to participate in the decision -making process and, most importantly, that they do not want to give women exclusive control over reproduction.

As pointed out by (Balakrishnan et al., 1972:35), the Royal Commission on the Status of Women has recommended that:

> ...abortions be permitted by a qualified medical practitioner solely on the request of any woman who has been pregnant for 12 weeks or less or at the request of a woman pregnant for more than 12 weeks if the doctor is convinced that the continuation of the pregnancy would endanger the physical or mental health of the woman, or if there is a substantial risk that if the child were born, it would be greatly handicapped either mentally or physically.

When the respondents were asked, "After what month in the pregnancy do you think it should be illegal to perform an abortion?" Opinions varied on this sensitive issue, as in almost half (49 percent) stated that it should be illegal to terminate any pregnancy if a woman has been pregnant for 12 weeks or less. Another controversial question on the abortion issue was, "When do you think human life begins?" Almost half of the respondents (47 percent) thought that human life begins at conception, 18 percent thought that human life begins with movement, and 15 percent admitted that "human life begins when the unborn baby could probably survive on the outside if it were born prematurely" while 16 percent thought that "human life begins only at birth".

**Socio-demographic Characteristics and Attitudes Toward Abortion**

Table 3 presents the variation in attitudes toward individual abortion items ("hard" reasons) among the 1987 respondents across socio-demographic backgrounds. It is clear that age has no influence on attitudes toward the permissibility of abortion for (mother's) health reason since while older men tended to agree more with each of the other three items, only for approval of abortion "if a woman is likely to suffer a nervous breakdown if she has the baby" does age have a statistically significant effect. Younger men are less likely to approve abortion on this ground than older men ($x^2 = 7.29$; $p < .01$). Education, marital status, and number of respondents' children do not have significant effect on attitudes toward "hard" reasons for abortion.

Religion has always been a major source of variation in attitudes toward abortion among women. Here we find the same for men. When attitudes toward abortion are examined for Catholics, Protestants, and those not affiliated with any religious denomination, it is apparent that respondents with no religious affiliation are the most liberal of all groups with regard to the approval of "hard" reasons — particularly the health reason ($x^2 = 16.65$; $p < .001$). Furthermore, it is also clear from the table that Protestant men are more liberal than Catholic men. The second "religion" measure

**Table 2**

Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Opinions on Abortion and Human Life, 1987

| | %yes |
|---|---|
| 1. Should a pregnant woman be allowed to obtain a legal abortion if the woman wants it for any reason? | 35 ( 80) |
| 2. Are you in favour of a law which permits a woman to have an abortion without her husband's consent? | 37 ( 85) |
| 3. After what month in the pregnancy do you think it should be illegal to perform an abortion? | |
| 1 - 6 Weeks | 10 ( 23) |
| 7 - 10 Weeks | 11 ( 25) |
| 12 Weeks | 28 ( 65) |
| 13 - 16 Weeks | 9 ( 22) |
| Over 16 Weeks | 7 ( 15) |
| Never Abort | 9 ( 20) |
| Don't Know | 26 ( 60) |
| 4. When do you think human life begins? | |
| Human life begins at conceptions | 47 (108) |
| Human life begins with movement | 17 ( 40) |
| Human life begins when the unborn baby could probably survive on the outside if it were born prematurely | 14 ( 33) |
| Human life begins at birth | 15 ( 34) |
| Other | 7 ( 15) |

n=230

**Table 3**

Socio-demographic Variation in Male Attitudes
Toward Abortion for Four "Hard" Reasons, 1987

| | Defect | Health | Rape | Breakdown |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | %yes | %yes | %yes | %yes |
| Age (years) | | | | |
| 18-29 | 79 ( 42) | 91 ( 52) | 82 ( 60) | 63 ( 34) |
| 30-44 | 87 ( 78) | 98 ( 93) | 89 ( 91) | 82 ( 75) |
| 45+ | 91 ( 67) | 96 ( 74) | 91 ( 42) | 78 ( 56)** |
| Education (years) | | | | |
| 6-11 | 91 ( 60) | 97 ( 67) | 91 ( 60) | 75 ( 49) |
| 12-15 | 86 ( 85) | 92 ( 96) | 88 ( 91) | 76 ( 77) |
| 16-24 | 80 ( 41) | 100 ( 55) | 82 ( 42) | 76 ( 38) |
| Marital Status | | | | |
| Single | 89 ( 41) | 94 ( 47) | 89 ( 42) | 76 ( 34) |
| Married | 85 (105) | 96 (126) | 86 (110) | 72 ( 93) |
| Others | 87 ( 41) | 98 ( 46) | 91 ( 42) | 88 ( 38) |
| Number of Children | | | | |
| None | 87 ( 68) | 95 ( 80) | 89 ( 71) | 76 ( 59) |
| 1-2 | 85 ( 73) | 96 ( 85) | 86 ( 76) | 77 ( 66) |
| 3 or More | 87 ( 46) | 96 ( 54) | 89 ( 47) | 76 ( 40) |
| Religious Affiliation | | | | |
| No Affiliation | 94 ( 49) | 100 ( 54) | 91 ( 49) | 81 ( 42) |
| Protestant | 90 ( 87) | 98 ( 98) | 90 ( 88) | 80 ( 77) |
| Catholic | 76 ( 38) | 93 ( 49) | 86 ( 42) | 68 ( 34) |
| Others | 71 ( 12)* | 80 ( 16)*** | 72 ( 13) | 59 ( 10) |
| Religiosity (Level) | | | | |
| Strong | 72 ( 41) | 88 ( 57) | 67 ( 41) | 58 ( 35) |
| Not Very Strong | 93 (122) | 98 (131) | 96 (126) | 84 (107) |
| Somewhat Strong | 78 ( 18)*** | 100 ( 24)*** | 91 ( 21)*** | 74 ( 17)*** |

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

examines the respondents' level of religiosity; whether it is "strong", "not very strong", or "somewhat strong". In general, a strong level of religiosity elicited low approval for abortion for each of the four "hard" reasons.

In contrast to "hard" reasons, analysis of the data found a significant association between age and two "soft" reasons for abortion. As Table 4 shows, significant associations exist between age and approval of abortion "if the family has a very low income" and "cannot afford any more children". Younger respondents (31 percent), who are most likely to be starting their families, are less likely to endorse abortion on this ground than older respondents ($x^2 = 7.36$; $p < .05$). Respondents in the middle age (30 - 44) category tend to endorse abortion (51 percent) much more than any other age group for the economic reason. Perhaps this reflects the greater pressure on this age group to control fertility. Younger respondents also displayed low abortion approval "if the woman is not married and does not want to marry the father". Surprisingly enough, education and number of respondents' children, which have been found to influence women's attitudes toward abortion, have no significant effect on the male respondents' attitudes. For example, (Balakrishnan et al., 1972: 37) observed a less liberal attitude toward abortion as family size increases among married women in metropolitan Toronto. However, fewer single respondents endorse abortion "if the woman is married and does not want any more children" than older respondents ($x^2 = 7.65$; $p < .05$).

Generally, religious differentials are present among the sample with regards to the endorsement of "soft" reasons for abortion. As expected, Catholic respondents indicated lowest abortion approval for each of the four "soft" reasons. Also, respondents with "strong" religious commitment were found to be consistently less permissive in their approval of "soft" reasons for abortion.

Table 5 presents the percentage distribution of opinions regarding one of the hotly debated ethical, moral and political issue of the day, "when does human life begin?" Although not statistically significant, few younger people (46 percent) believe that human life begins at conception. More than half of the men in the 30 - 34 age group thought that human life begins at conception. Level of education is a major source of variation in respondents opinions regarding when human life begins. Respondents with a lower level of education are less likely to admit that human life begins at conception than more highly educated respondents ($x^2 = 6.26$; $p < .05$). Both marital status and number of children had by respondents have influence on the respondents' view on "when human life begins".

Religious orientation is statistically related to respondents' views on when human life begins. More Catholics believed that human life begins at conception (65 percent) than Protestants (38 percent)($x^2 = 14.86$; $p < .01$). Furthermore, level of religiosity also differentiates the respondents' views of when human life begins. The majority of respondents with "strong" religious commitment (69 percent) concur that human life begins at conception ($x^2 = 14.69$; $p < .01$).

**Summary and Conclusion**

The present study examined the attitudes of urban Canadian men toward abortion in an attempt to partially correct the unbalanced orientation in abortion attitude research. Specifically, the study analyzed male opinions about a variety of circumstances in which abortion ought or ought not to be permitted in Canada. The results indicate that opinions regarding the permissibility of legal abortion vary greatly depending on the circumstance. Generally, respondents are overwhelmingly more predisposed to endorse abortion for "hard" reasons than for "soft" reasons. However, the support for abortion "if possible detects in the baby" declined during the ten year period. Of the "soft" reasons, only one item, "the woman is not married and does not want to marry the father," received greater approval between 1977 and 1987 In 1987, only 43 percent endorsed abortion as a result of extra-marital affairs.

**Table 4**

Socio-demographic Variation in Male Attitudes Toward Abortion
for Four "Soft" Reasons, 1987

| | Income | Affair | Marriage | Children |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | %yes | %yes | %yes | %yes |
| Age (years) | | | | |
| 18-29 | 31 ( 42) | 36 ( 19) | 42 ( 21) | 29 ( 16) |
| 30-44 | 54 ( 78) | 43 ( 38) | 67 ( 60) | 48 ( 44) |
| 45+ | 49 ( 67)* | 48 ( 35) | 66 ( 45)** | 46 ( 34) |
| Education (years) | | | | |
| 6-11 | 48 ( 31) | 49 ( 31) | 60 ( 39) | 45 ( 29) |
| 12-15 | 49 ( 47) | 40 ( 40) | 62 ( 60) | 44 ( 44) |
| 16-24 | 42 ( 21) | 42 ( 21) | 54 ( 27) | 39 ( 21) |
| Marital Status | | | | |
| Single | 41 ( 19) | 44 ( 20) | 51 ( 23) | 33 ( 16) |
| Married | 42 ( 50) | 38 ( 47) | 57 ( 70) | 40 ( 51) |
| Others | 64 ( 30)* | 56 ( 25) | 72 ( 33) | 60 ( 27)* |
| Number of Children | | | | |
| None | 47 ( 37) | 53 ( 40) | 53 ( 40) | 35 ( 28) |
| 1-2 | 47 ( 38) | 61 ( 51) | 61 ( 51) | 47 ( 41) |
| 3 or More | 45 ( 24) | 65 ( 35) | 65 ( 35) | 46 ( 25) |
| Religious Affiliation | | | | |
| No Affiliation | 54 ( 28) | 44 ( 23) | 69 ( 34) | 53 ( 27) |
| Protestant | 54 ( 51) | 50 ( 48) | 73 ( 67) | 44 ( 43) |
| Catholic | 29 ( 14) | 30 ( 15) | 33 ( 17) | 29 ( 15) |
| Others | 35 ( 6)** | 38 ( 6) | 40 ( 7)*** | 44 ( 8) |
| Religiosity (Level) | | | | |
| Strong | 28 ( 16) | 29 ( 17) | 38 ( 23) | 30 ( 18) |
| Not Very Strong | 54 ( 68) | 49 ( 62) | 70 ( 88) | 47 ( 61) |
| Somewhat Strong | 44 ( 10)*** | 46 ( 10)* | 52 ( 11) | 42 ( 10) |

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

**Table 5**

Percentage Distribution of Beliefs Regarding When Human Life Begins, 1987

| | Human Life Begins At Conception |
|---|---|
| | %yes |
| Age (years) | |
| 18-29 | 46 ( 25) |
| 30-44 | 54 ( 51) |
| 45+ | 45 ( 32) |
| Education (years) | |
| 6-11 | 36 ( 22) |
| 12-15 | 55 ( 56) |
| 16-24 | 53 ( 29)* |
| Marital Status | |
| Single | 37 ( 18) |
| Married | 56 ( 71) |
| Others | 44 ( 19) |
| Number of Children | |
| None | 41 ( 33) |
| 1-2 | 52 ( 45) |
| 3 or More | 57 ( 30) |
| Religious Affiliation | |
| No Affiliation | 43 ( 21) |
| Protestant | 38 ( 38) |
| Catholic | 65 ( 33) |
| Others | 74 ( 14)*** |
| Religiosity (Level) | |
| Strong | 69 ( 42) |
| Not Very Strong | 39 ( 50) |
| Somewhat Strong | 50 ( 12)** |

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Also in 1987, only 37 percent of the male respondents favored a law which permits a woman to have an abortion without her husband's consent. Less than half (47 percent) believed that human life begins at conception, and about 49 percent thought it should be illegal to perform an abortion if a woman has been pregnant for 12 weeks or less.

The analysis of six socio-demographic characteristics of respondents indicates only slight differences in attitudes toward "hard" reasons. However, socio-demographic differences are observed regarding the permissibility of abortion for "soft" reasons. Younger men are less liberal in their approval of "economic" and "marriage" reasons for abortion than are older men. Both religious orientation and level of religiosity differentiate the respondents on the approval of legal abortion for "soft" reasons. In contrast to previous research, particularly among women, the number of respondents' children exerts no influence on their attitude toward abortion. As to when human life begins, level of education, religious affiliation, and level of religiosity differentiate the male respondents.

In conclusion, the parallelism between men's attitudes toward abortion and the abortion statutes is actually an important result for two reasons: (1) men for the most part set up legislation governing abortion, and (2) conditions for abortion are often attributed to women even though some of these conditions are often precipitated by men. For example, a woman may experience poor health or nervous breakdown if her partner or spouse fails to support her financially and emotionally during pregnancy.

New abortion laws are under consideration in Canada. In this context, the present research is timely since it may reflect what type of abortion laws are in sight. It is certain that as long as the abortion laws provide room for conflict, discontent with the abortion law is inevitable, particularly when pro-choice groups begin to address the conditions for abortion from the male perspective. For example, should abortion be permitted if: (1) the pregnancy was planned and the man changed his mind, (2) having the child now would hurt both the mother's and father's career, (3) the man wants the child but his partner doesn't, (4) the woman is unmarried but her partner declines to support her both emotionally and financially, and (5) the man wants more children but his wife doesn't.

These are some of the neglected issues that will likely affect the future of Canadian abortion laws. This suggests that future research on the attitudes toward abortion needs to focus on both women and men thus providing a better understanding of public attitudes toward abortion.

**Footnotes**

1. The city makes up about 24 percent of the Alberta population. In comparison to the 1986 Census, the samples are considered to be representative on all the socio-demographic characteristics presented in the analysis.

2. The categories of response were "yes", "no" and "don't know".

3. The identifying words in parenthesis to the right of each item are used in the subsequent tables.

4. Income, political party affiliation, and ethnicity did not have a significant effect on individual abortion items (hard and soft); hence are not reported.

5. The 1987 data are highlighted in the present analysis not only because they are recent but because they ask about the greatest variety of conditions under which abortion is approved.

**References**

Balakrishnan, T. et al. 1972. Attitudes toward abortion of married women in Metropolitan Toronto. Social Biology 19:35-42.

Boyd, M. and D. Gillieson 1975. Canadian attitudes on abortion: Results of the Gallup Polls. Canadian Studies in Population 2:53-64.

Ebaugh, H.R. and C.A. Harvey 1980. Shift in abortion attitudes: 1972-1978. Journal of Marriage and the Family 42:491-499.

Jones, E.F. and Westoff, C.F. 1978. How attitudes toward abortion are changing. Journal of Population 1(1):5-21.

Hartnagel, T.F., J.J. Creechan and R.A. Silverman 1984. Public Opinion and the Legalization of Abortion. Edmonton: Centre for Criminological Research, University of Alberta.

Kinzel C. 1987. 1987 All Alberta Study (including the Edmonton Area Study) Sampling Report. Edmonton Area Series Report No. 51. Edmonton: Population Research Laboratory, University of Alberta.

McIntosh, W.A. et al 1979. The differential impact of religious attendance on attitude toward abortion. Review of Religious Research 20(2):195-213.

Smetang J.G. 1979. Beliefs about the permissibility of abortion and their relationship to decisions regarding abortion. Journal of Population 2(4):294-305.

Veevers, I.E. 1971. The liberalization of the Canadian abortion laws. Pp. 33-39 in C.L. Boydell, C.F. Grindstaff and P.C. Whitehead, Critical Issues in Canadian Society. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart.